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Five key roles for 21st-century school librarians

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School librarians, with their specialized training in collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating information, now must teach their patrons to perform these tasks.

According to Joyce Valenza, teacher librarian at [Springfield Township High School](#) [2] in Pennsylvania and author of *School Library Journal*'s "Never Ending Search" blog, this is the golden age of librarianship.

Co-presenting a [session](#) [3] at educational technology leader Alan November's 2012 [Building Learning Communities](#) [4] (BLC) conference on July 19 with [Shannon McClintock Miller](#) [5], district librarian and technology integration specialist at [Van Meter School](#) [6]s in Iowa, Valenza outlined five areas in which K-12 schools should turn to their librarians to empower learners with valuable 21st-century college and career readiness skills.

"Librarians are in the sweet spot of education," Valenza said.

Given the unprecedented quantity of information learners are exposed to, the librarian's role is more important than ever. Librarians help all students gain access to, evaluate, ethically use, create, share, and synthesize information. These skills are easily grouped into the following categories, she and Miller said.

Curation

Students have long documented their research in notebooks, bibliographies, and research papers, but the presenters described these containers as inadequate for the digital landscape. In the 20th century, content was king, but in this millennium, [curation](#) [7] has emerged as the new monarch.

Valenza and Miller highlighted emerging technologies that help students showcase their progress as they acquire, organize, contextualize, and archive both existing content and new learning. Transparency is a critical component in growing what media scholar Pierre Levy calls [knowledge citizens](#) [8]. The presenters stressed the value of teaching learners to purposefully contribute to society's collective intelligence.

For more news from BLC 2012, see:

[New project aims to transform the 'first five days' of school](#) [9]

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This concept is fleshed out in Steven Rosenbaum's book, [Curation Nation](#) [12]. School librarians, with their specialized training and background in collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating information, must now teach their patrons—students and educators alike—to perform these tasks.

The following curation tools were referenced during the presentation: [Diigo](#) [13], [LiveBinders](#) [14], [Paper.Li](#) [15], [Pinterest](#) [16], [PearlTrees](#) [17], [Posterous](#) [18], [Scoop.It](#) [19], [Sqworl](#) [20], [Storify](#) [21], [Symbaloo](#) [22].

Citizenship/Compassion

"With great power comes great responsibility," said Valenza. Building society's collective intelligence requires contributors to respect its infrastructure. This is the essence of digital citizenship.

Students must be taught how to publish their work for the real world, with their real identity (not anonymously), to build their digital footprint with purpose. This approach embeds authentic learning about the importance of intellectual property. If "public is the new default," as Valenza prescribes, accountability is built in. When their own work is public, students better appreciate the cost of having published work repurposed without permission, particularly if they are taught to license their work under Creative Commons or other intellectual property licensing systems.

The presentation featured a 2010 study which reported that [70 percent](#) ^[23] of American colleges consult prospective students' Facebook profiles as part of the admissions process. The study underscores the importance of teaching students how to monitor their digital footprint. A clear picture of their digital activity helps them better understand what Eli Pariser (a keynote speaker at the 2012 BLC conference) calls their personal [filter bubble](#) ^[24]. It is fair to assume that students will make mistakes online. Supervision and guidance will help them rectify and learn from their mistakes. As in all aspects of learning, gradual release of responsibility is key.

Among the takeaways from Alan November's [2011 BLC conference](#) ^[25] was the importance of instilling empathy and harnessing passion among learners. In this 2012 presentation, Miller described how her learners in a rural Iowa K-12 school of 600 students were empowered to make a difference by showing compassion for learners in other parts of the world.

For example, her students formed a Van Meter [She's the First](#) ^[26] [chapter](#) ^[27] to send a Tanzanian girl, Neema, to a school where she would have access to technology. In their first year, they raised \$1,000, meeting their goal. There were other examples that underscored Miller's commitment to giving her students authentic opportunities to make a difference in their world and give them vehicles to broadcast their experiences. Not only did these opportunities enrich her students' digital footprints, but they contextualized the impact of citizenship.

Creation

The participatory nature of 21st-century culture emboldens students to create and publish content—all kinds of content, but particularly multimedia content. Given the opportunity, students will transform work into play. Audience fuels their creativity, not standards and rubrics. This is borne out in the work of cultural anthropologist [Mimi Ito](#) ^[28], who describes "... two different learning cultures—one that is about youth-driven social engagement and sharing, and the other that is embodied in educational institutions' adult-driven agendas."

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Valenza and Miller described the importance of granting students permission to experiment and explore, and the time to reflect and process their learning, to make it into something new. Students need to take ownership of their learning before it becomes relevant to them. Librarians, who have always served as matchmakers of sorts—pairing books with readers, resources with research questions, and, more recently, problems with tools to solve them—should be the "go-to person(s)" to support learners as they construct their knowledge.

Choice plays as critical a role as time in this process. The presenters, who both teach in schools that encourage learners to use their own technology in the classroom, described Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) as a foundation for differentiation. Librarianship is being redefined by mobile technology. Finding teaching resources, evaluating, and synthesizing

information are only relevant if students can access these resources. Given the wide array of distributive technologies for library services, it is incumbent upon librarians to empower students to use their devices for learning and productivity.

Connections

The very constraints of Van Meter's small-town isolation fuel its culture of connectiveness. Miller helps her students build their own personal learning networks by connecting with experts and collaborators as needed—in real time when they can, or asynchronously when they can't.

As the lone librarian and technology integration specialist for an entire district, regularly meeting her K-8 students on a fixed schedule, Miller does not teach alone. She models collaboration by forming instructional partnerships with educators around the world. [Two Libraries, One Voice](#) ^[29], a joint blog documenting Miller's co-teaching experience with John Schumacher, Brook Forest Elementary School's librarian 338 miles away in Illinois, illustrates how technology transcends geography in the new millennium.

Among the highlights of her partnerships with educators in Michigan, New Hampshire, and Philadelphia, Miller featured ongoing, multi-pronged collaborations that are open to any educator wishing to include his or her students, such as [Somewhat Virtual Book Club](#) ^[30] and [World Read Aloud Day](#) ^[31]. If George Siemens' statement, "[The network is the learning](#)" ^[32], is true, then Miller and her colleagues built a formidable learning platform for their students—and many, many others.

Common Core

Invariably, there comes a time when either Valenza or Miller deliver a presentation where an audience member raises a hand to say, "Yes, but..." After the "but" comes a reference to state testing, instructional mandates, curricular requirements, and so on. In this session, Valenza and Miller collectively preempted that interruption by addressing what educators in 45 states are now facing—the [Common Core State Standards](#) ^[33] (CCSS).

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According to Lauren Davis, senior editor at *Eye on Education*, there are [five things](#) ^[34] every educator should do to meet the CCSS. Her list includes focusing on process, publishing for real audiences, and engaging in discourse. Valenza and Miller explained that curation, citizenship & compassion, creation, and connection embed experiences into instruction that make the CCSS gel for learners. They make learning authentic and relevant. They *are* the Common Core.

Miller illustrated this point by showcasing Van Meter's curriculum, which is a crosswalk between the Iowa, CCSS, International Society for Technology in Education, and American Association of School Librarians standards. Van Meter teachers, including Miller, post their learning targets for each lesson. Their students are curating, behaving, creating, and connecting with a purpose—to meet learning standards. They are just doing it creatively, and in both schools, it is the teacher librarian who facilitates innovative, yet robust, standards-based instruction across disciplines.

Michelle Luhtala is the library department chair at New Canaan High School in Connecticut. She facilitates a professional learning community for more than 3,500 school librarians at [edWeb.net/emergingtech](#). She serves on the American Association of School Librarians' Board of Directors and serves on two Connecticut Digital Library advisory boards. Luhtala is a contributing author to [Growing Schools: Librarians as Professional Developers](#) ^[35] and is frequently published in professional literature for school librarians. She blogs at [Bibliotech.me](#).

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- [1] Image: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/08/02/five-key-roles-for-21st-century-school-librarians/librarian/>
- [2] Springfield Township High School: <http://springfieldlibrary.wikispaces.com>
- [3] session: <http://joyceatblc.wikispaces.com/>
- [4] Building Learning Communities: <http://2012.blcconference.com>
- [5] Shannon McClintock Miller: <http://vanmeterlibraryvoice.blogspot.com>
- [6] Van Meter School: <http://vmbulldogs.com>
- [7] uration: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46tTz1IpzOw&feature=youtu.be&t=9s>
- [8] *knowledge citizens*: <http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/collective%20intelligence.html>
- [9] New project aims to transform the 'first five days' of school: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/07/19/new-project-aims-to-transform-the-first-five-days-of-school/>
- [10] How TED-Ed is helping to amplify instruction: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/07/19/how-ted-ed-is-helping-to-amplify-instruction/>
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- [12] *Curation Nation*: <http://curationnation.org>
- [13] Diigo: <http://www.diigo.com>
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